DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 463 423 CE 083 020

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TITLE Integrated Model of VET Dynamics: Social and Economic Benefits for All. CRLRA Discussion Paper.
INSTITUTION Tasmania Univ., Launceston (Australia). Centre for Learning & Research in Regional Australia.
REPORT NO CRLRA-D1/2001
ISSN ISSN-1440-480X
PUB DATE 2001-00-00
NOTE 12p.; Keynote presentation at the VISTA Annual Conference "Training Culture and the VET Professional: Community Industry and Education" (Lorne, Australia, May 27-29, 2001).
AVAILABLE FROM For full text: http://www.crlra.utas.edu.au/files/discussion/2001/D1-2001.pdf.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Access to Education; Community Development; Definitions; *Economic Development; *Educational Benefits; Educational Equity (Finance); Educational Needs; Educational Planning; Educational Quality; Equal Education; Foreign Countries; Integrated Curriculum; Models; *Policy Formation; Position Papers; Postsecondary Education; Program Development; Program Evaluation; *School Community Relationship; Secondary Education; Social Capital; *Social Development; *Vocational Education; Well Being
IDENTIFIERS Australia; Impact Studies; Learning Communities; Place Based Education; Sense of Community; *TAFE (Australia)

ABSTRACT

The model currently used to represent the impacts of Australia's technical and further education (TAFE) programs implies a one-way flow of impact from TAFE to student to community. It may be argued that TAFE could better serve its clients by developing a social capital-based, two-way, reciprocal dynamic of vocational education and training (VET) planning and development. The evidence from a 5-year research effort encompassing more than 50 whole communities largely supports an integrated rather than segregated model of VET. The research has identified the following needs ("drivers") of the vocational learning experience: community; culture; enterprise; natural resource management; policy; providers; and industry. Vocational policy depends on two factors. The first is identifying vital checkpoints in the process of vocational learning where quality learning can be seen to have occurred. The second is identifying accurate benchmarks for profiling these checkpoints of quality. The solution to meeting these needs and conditions at the local level while juggling the demands of national strategic measures and data requirements lies in adopting a "community capacity inventory" model and resourcing through key performance measures. An integrated model of VET would be fairer and more accurate to all VET stakeholders, be more cost-effective for TAFE, and be better for enterprise and policy outcomes. (Contains 19 references.) (MN)

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ED 463 423

Discussion Paper D1/2001

CRLRA Discussion Paper
Series ISSN 1440-480X

UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

Integrated Model of VET Dynamics: Social and economic benefits for all

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Keynote presentation at the VISTA Annual Conference: 'Training Culture and the VET Professional: Community Industry and Education', 27–29 May 2001, Cumberland Resort, Lorne.

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Abstract

TAFE has a range of impacts on the stakeholders they serve. Students, of course, are the primary stakeholders. But it is the students themselves who live and work in communities of place. Virtual communities are always secondary to locality-based communities. TAFE therefore impacts directly on communities through their primary clients. This model, however, implies a one-way flow of impact from TAFE to student to community.

What I suggest in this paper is that TAFE can better 'serve its clients' by developing a two-way, reciprocal 'dynamic': the dynamic of VET planning and development. To make its point, the paper will describe examples and cases of the 'seven drivers of VET' (including the two well-recognised one of industry and enterprise), and so provide some evidence for how the integrated model of VET is (a) fairer to all VET stakeholders, (b) more cost-effective for TAFE, (c) better for enterprise - especially small business, (d) better for policy outcomes.

Why is this important?

Talking about social and economic benefits with VET or TAFE in the same sentence, as it appears in the title for this paper, provides the first hint of what an 'integrated model of VET' might look like in practice. Linking these terms suggests a reciprocal interconnection, the possibility that each impacts on the other –VET on their communities' capacities to impact on economic outcomes such as jobs and income, and the influence of these contingencies on social cohesion and wellbeing in communities, regions and the nation as a whole. It is this relationship between VET and its various tiers of influence on communities, regions and the nation that lies beneath my argument here.

The value of VET to a community is related to many factors operating within and on that community. On the one hand, as Balatti and Falk (2000) show:

> …it is the existing community capacity at any given time that impacts on how training can contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of the community members. (p. 1)

On the other hand, VET activity and its institutional base builds community capacity in a number of different ways. The matters for this paper are to explain the dynamics of the interactions between VET and the wider community, to crystallise from that discussion what the key drivers for VET are in the community context, and finally to clarify what I mean by an 'integrated model of VET'.

How can we maximise the value of training? Balatti and Falk (2000) explain that the integrated approach is important because the interconnectedness between VET and this much larger, more holistic, more organic notion of 'community capacity' is an opportunity to look at our practices in new ways. At one level, it invites a panoramic perspective, an aerial view of how the activity that fills our days relates to the activity of others who are also in the same business of producing value to the community from its VET investment. This perspective takes our vision beyond what's happening at our own desk, office, or workplace. It allows us to see how our activity works in with that of others with whom we share this common goal. It helps us ascertain how our activities overlap or are working to the same ends and provide one another leverage. It may also reveal how we are possibly duplicating or even working against each other to the detriment of our common goal.

It is this link between community capacity and vocational education and training that has been the subject of much of our research at the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia in the last five years. More than fifty communities – urban, regional and rural – have been studied across a number of different research projects in all states and the Northern Territory in an effort to search for the reasons that make some communities profit more than

others from the training that goes on in their offices, factories, farms and workshops. The link between community capacity and VET became evident when we explored questions such as *What are the factors that affect the value a community gets out of training? In what ways does training contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of a community?* Here the researchers were not only interested in what the contributions were but also how they actually came about. However, before I discuss further the dynamics of the relationship between VET and its community, I will first mention the way in which we use the term 'community' and some related terms that we are finding useful to use.

What is a 'community'?

A community can mean many things to many people. In general, I use a recent definition of community:

> … a work team, a workplace, an organisation, or an industry. A community is also be a geographical community such as a city, a town, a district or region and it can be sectors of these larger groups defined for example, by age, ethnicity, occupation or other socio-economic criteria. We hear of the Greek community in Melbourne, the refugee community in Maribyrnong, the farming community in Tasmania, the business community of Brisbane, the Indigenous community of Cairns. (Balatti & Falk, 2000, p. 1)

A community can also be a virtual or electronic community. However, this kind of definition has limited uses in practice. For the purpose of this paper, I will refer to the VET dynamic as being facilitated by *learning communities.* A learning community can be a geographic community of people - a town or suburb. It can refer to a learning city, a learning region or a 'learning organisation' such as a big corporation. A learning community can, of course, also be a community of interest, an email chat-group or a professional association.

What is community capacity?

In broad terms, community capacity refers to the human, physical and social resources available in a defined location. Of course, this includes the available knowledge and skills but is not restricted to formal qualifications as denoting the presence of these. A working definition of community capacity that we have at the research centre specifies what the tangible outcomes of community capacity might be in terms of its social and economic outcomes might be. We would suggest that:

…community capacity is the community's resources (human, physical and social) that are available to plan for and meet its social and economic needs in pursuit of a quality of life that is acceptable to its members and to the larger community of region, state, and country.

As a means of identifying the elements that make up quality of life or social and economic wellbeing, we are using a set of Social Indicators produced by the OECD (1982) which, after an exhaustive developmental and research process spanning two decades, finally settled on eight indicative categories. These eight bands of indicators are:

1. Health
2. Education and learning
3. Employment and quality of working life
4. Time / Leisure
5. Command over goods and services
6. Environment
7. Social Environment
8. Personal Safety

When we use these bands, we have found that vocational education and training, both formal and informal, has the potential – although not always realised – to contribute positively to every one of these aspects of social and economic wellbeing (Balatti & Falk, 2000). The question here is how does it do this. The answer lies in how VET is incorporated in the overall capacity that the community has to achieve its goals, and this is the dynamic of learning communities. It is the dynamic that in turn builds the community's social cohesion and social capital.

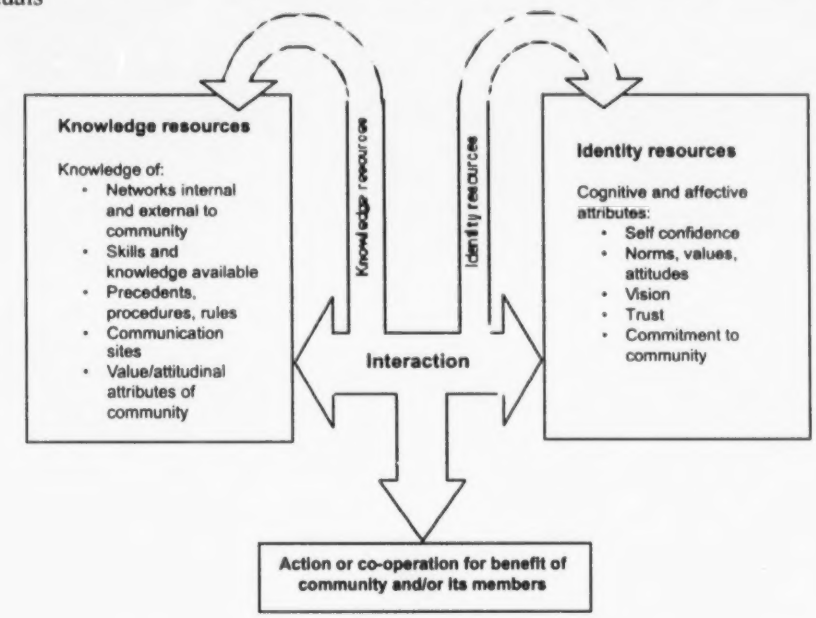
Social capital and its benefits

Social capital helps communities respond positively to change. The power of social capital to improve outcomes for individuals, communities, regions and whole nations in the developing and developed world has attracted considerable interest in recent times. Social capital is most simply defined as the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). It is a set of resources that resides in the relationships among people and allows them to share their knowledge and skills, or human capital (Coleman, 1990). Research into managing change through learning in communities and in businesses has highlighted the importance of relationships between people and the formal and informal infrastructure of communities to the quality of outcomes experienced by communities, businesses and individuals.

The elements of social capital that can be used to improve outcomes for individuals and communities are networks (internal and external to the community), appropriate procedures, rules and organisational structures, human infrastructure (leaderships and social brokers), self-confidence, trust and shared norms, values and visions. Social capital is built as values, norms and attitudes are compared and shared, and trust developed. Participation in interactions and activities with community members has the potential to develop shared values and trust. Interaction can also develop individuals' self-confidence, leadership capabilities and shared visions. Networks are formed and maintained through interaction. The effectiveness of interactions will be shaped by the context in which they take place, including the social brokers, procedures, rules and organisational structures present in the community and society.

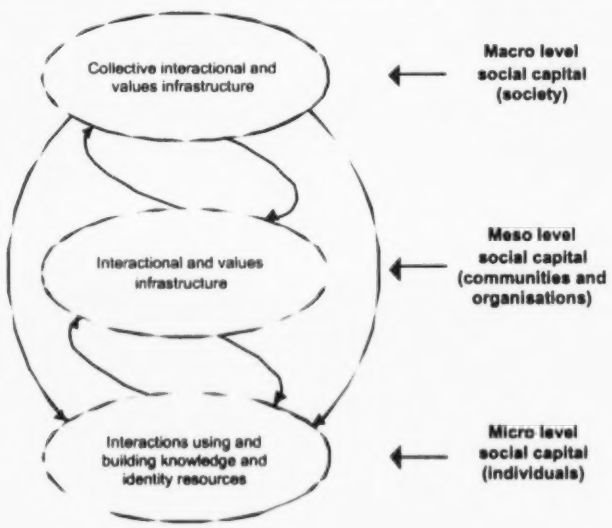
Figure 1 shows how Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) have found that social capital is built and used.

Figure 1: Simultaneous building and using of social capital in interactions between individuals



The premise of this paper is that the local level (micro), collaborative planning and development activities occur through networks, trust and shared values and that, in turn, this activity influences regional (meso) then societal (macro) level economic and social outcomes. Falk and Kilpatrick illustrate how this occurs in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Societal and community level social capital resources sustained by interpersonal interactions


Collective interactional and values infrastructure
Macro level social capital (society)
Interactional and values infrastructure
Meso level social capital (communities and organisations)
Interactions using and building knowledge and identity resources
Micro level social capital (individuals)

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In this previous rather intensive overview of the 'planks' in the rationale for a new way of looking at (and measuring) VET's impact on social and economic wellbeing, we have seen how CRLRA research has progressively clarified the knowledge areas that form the argument as a whole. In short, in order to sustain the call for a new way of viewing and measuring these dynamics, we must show that there are benefits for all, including those concerned with the policy and practice VET development and implementation.

The evidence

The argument so far can be summarised as this: Australia's social and economic wellbeing depends on strong and vibrant local regions and communities. There is a growing body of evidence from the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia demonstrating that dynamic and purposeful learning communities have significant economic benefits, as well as strengthening the civic fibre of community life through building social capital.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development, the OECD (Hugonnier, 1999), has found that development strategies that are driven from the community and regional level, often called a 'bottom-up' approach, are successful in achieving their economic goals, while those that are driven from 'above', or outside the community via a 'top-down' approach have always been unsuccessful. The vocational education and training sector is a partner and facilitator in this bottom up approach.

The question remaining is, *How do we achieve this blissful state of affairs?*

Our research has encompassed more than 50 whole communities and spanned 5 years. The evidence I present today, which is largely in favour of an integrated not segregated model of VET, is drawn from the outcomes of several, not just one, of these studies.

Integrated VET system

The recent Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee on *Quality of Vocational Education and Training in Australia* report (2000) refers to the issue of determining VET quality and notes the present deficiencies and conditions needed for quality to occur. It then refers to: "...the achievement of a truly national, truly integrated VET system".

What does an integrated VET system mean in terms of 'TAFE serving their communities'? How might it be possible to judge or assess this set of impacts?

Elements of processes in quality VET

Quality depends on filling needs. Whose needs? The needs of vocational learners which are integrated in the learner as they travel through work, community, public and leisure lives – usually all on the one day.

The single biggest 'constraint' on considering what to do to improve quality is stated in a recent research finding:

> The importance of meeting diverse local vocational learning needs is the overriding issue to emerge in all the regions. (CRLRA 2001).

These 'needs' can be expressed as drivers of the vocational learning experience. Seven drivers of quality VET are identified (CRLRA 2001):

1. Community
2. Culture

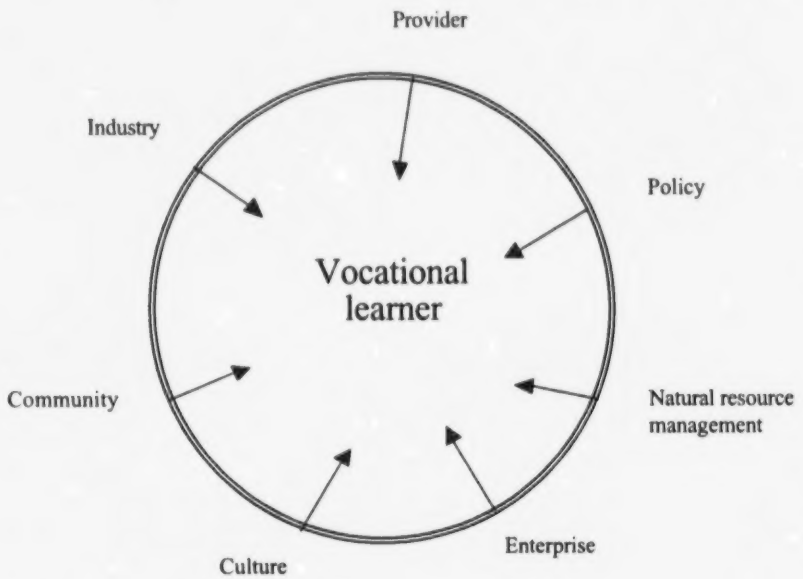
3. Enterprise
4. Natural resource management
5. Policy
6. Providers
7. Industry

Not one, nor another, but all. It is interesting to analyse existing VET policy documents to see how many on this list are currently regarded as drivers of VET.

Therefore, the most accurate way of establishing the quality of VET in this dynamic situation is to assure the point-of-learning itself. This is done through assuring the vocational learning journey.

The relationship between the individuals' learning journey and the drivers can be pictured as in Figure 3:

Figure 3: Drivers of Vocational Learning



Achieving quality in VET depends on two factors:
1. Identifying the vital checkpoints in the process of vocational learning where quality learning can be seen to have occurred;
2. Identifying accurate benchmarks for profiling these checkpoints of quality.

How can these needs and conditions be met at the local level while juggling the demands of national strategic measures and data requirements?

'Community capacity inventory' model and resourcing through KPMs
The answer to the question lies in the assumption that if quality VET is resourced through Key Performance Measures (KPMs) of that quality, then quality VET will follow. Some of the present ANTA KPMs *are* indicators of capacity, for example KPM 2 which is *Stock of*

VET skills against desired levels. This KPM sounds as if it is related to meeting needs, but it does not in reality exist, as the ANTA (1999) report makes clear:

> Further work is required to develop a model/s for determining Australian industry demand for skills based on standard industry planning tools such as skills shortages identification, economic forecasting and expert advice. (p. 25)

This kind of thinking is also, unfortunately, flawed. For a start, who is 'industry'? We know at present that it only rhetorically includes small business who employ more than a half of Australia's workforce. Who else might industry be? Industry could include communities and regions, but I imagine at this stage it does not in practice do so. In addition, given the diversity across different regions proven (in ours and others' research) a single national measure is not helpful.

Presently, resources are allocated to the states and territories primarily on the single measure of Student Contact Hours (SCH). That is, quality is not presently resourced, but delivery as SCHs is. This single SCH measure has had a negative impact on our judgements about success because of the 'backwash effect':

> ...it is all competency based assessment but in theory you can push them out the door in six months, not a problem, but what are their employment chances?... we have a 95% employment rate ... and that is always one of our selling points.... We need courses that are going to be full twelve months as a certificate III... Now the average push obviously from the powers to be for short term course... Student contact hours and numbers coming through the shorter the course the better from their stats, but it doesn't do much from an employment point of view... We are under a lot of pressure because our courses are too long but no one else can get the employment rate that we have.

To successfully meet diverse and changing local VET needs, quality in VET should focus on an integrated model of VET based on the vocational learning experience, rather than a system which focuses only on individual sectors such as provider (RTO) and industry. This option integrates the needs meeting requirement as well as assuring the vocational learning experience. This option also addresses the recurrent findings of several research projects (e.g., CRLRA 2000, 2001). It dovetails with a VET apprenticeship and traineeship benchmarking project recently completed for the Tasmania government (Vallence, Falk & Kilpatrick, 2001). Those benchmarks assure the Vocational Learning Checkpoints (VLCs) along the way of an apprentice's or trainee's vocational learning journey. The latter is specifically tailored for apprenticeships and traineeships, and this is the list of 12 Vocational Learning Checkpoints (VLCs) in this model:

Checkpoints on the Vocational Learning Journey for Apprentices and Trainees

CHECKPOINT	CHECKPOINT TITLE
1	Provision of contextual information
2	Eligibility and selection for employment and training
3	Induction to the Apprenticeship/Traineeship
4	Training information
5	Skills assessment (Recognition of Current Competency) and preparation of an on and off the job Training Plan
6	The Apprentice/Trainee's vocational learning experience
7	Competency assessment
8	Provision if the Apprentice/Trainee's learning is 'at risk'

9	Provision of learning feedback
10	Provision of a grievance process
11	Receipt of a qualification
12	Evaluation and validation of vocational learning

The above principle of benchmarking the vocational learning experience 'checkpoints' for apprenticeships and traineeships can be easily tailored to the community capacity model. For example, by tailoring Checkpoint One's 'contextual information' through a community capacity analysis. A stakeholder analysis around each checkpoint will provide the information required for establishing 'audit points'. Data in the form of indicators can be formed into a Community VET Profile, and drawn on to establish the actual resourcing 'measure' or criteria for funding allocations to states and territories.

The option requires that we benchmark capacity around each of the checkpoints on an inclusive vocational learning experience. It has multiple benefits, since in implementing this model there will be a clear picture of the labour markets and changing work patterns of the region, informing the community's economic development processes. It responds to and manages change at a local level, avoiding problems of an inflexible system that becomes outdated quickly. Policy makers should be pleased in these times where change is endemic, that, by assuring process, the system would always remain relevant. It is also highly cost-effective because funds can be targeted at specific points of need in the community's process of building capacity, rather than using a scattergun approach. It will identify strengths and weaknesses to be built on and addressed. The capacity inventory activity around the vocational learning experience checkpoints ensures locking in collateral needs-meeting processes around each activity, building networks, supporting and initiating VET potential and actual collaborations, and identifies leadership issues for resourcing or use.

An integrated community planning process is the first step in establishing the community capacity inventory model. Local council and their economic and community development officers, peak associations, Chambers of Commerce, cultural associations, public service representatives and other business and government agencies - all would be involved along with the education and training organisations. This process, collaboratively planned and conducted according to the principles of community capacity planning and asset inventories, would ensure the needs would be identified and the vocational learning experience mapped to meet the diverse local needs.

In other words this model provides a means of involving increasing numbers of members of TAFE's constituency. These are the steps to building strong communities and regions, and we all know that it is strong regions that build to a knowledge nation through building a socially cohesive, viable and vibrant socio-economy.

Summary and conclusions

The advantages of integrated model of VET appear to be these:
(a) It is fairer and more accurate to all VET stakeholders
(b) It is more cost-effective for TAFE
(c) TAFE plays in centre stage - becomes facilitator and knowledge broker
(d) It is better for enterprise - especially small business
(e) It is better for policy outcomes because policy actually gets enacted from the bottom up.

The chief drawback is that the 'bottom up' model sounds more complex to measure with KPMs. However, it does not need to be and in fact can be designed to be simple and self-accounting if governments are prepared to devolve some accountability and trust in the good judgement of the people.

The strongest point to emerge from our research is that resourcing begins with the identification of what processes must be assured to guarantee quality VET outcomes. Then these processes can be benchmarked to as to meet the needs of all stakeholders at each VLC in the vocational learners' journey, not just a few. Then the resourcing measures or indicators that best align with these benchmarks can be established, so that the benchmarks work with the resourcing data. That is, resourcing criteria should match KPMs and KPMs should capture an integrated VET system's benchmarks.

VET and TAFE's role in the learning community dynamic has the potential to be one of facilitating the process of community capacity benchmarking. Leadership provided by TAFE can be a key initiator of quality VET outcomes derived from collaborative processes. The kind of enabling leadership required to facilitate cross-sectoral planning and development processes can put and keep TAFE in touch with the local community and its changing needs. This increases the small business sector's involvement in VET. It would also give legs to the access and equity notion of 'inclusive' VET learning, since VET is located as the facilitator for participation in VET. It also places VET/TAFE at the core of identifying sound commercial opportunities that can benefit the local region. The model has at its core the idea that strategic networking has good access, equity, participation *and* business outcomes.

TAFE has always responded to its communities. But they are not getting the recognition for this that they deserve. Without the resourcing criteria aligning with the local benchmarking indicators, TAFE institutes will have neither the incentive nor the opportunity to shift their strategic directions or have those initiatives recognised. The alignment of resourcing and quality benchmarking criteria remains the single most important issue to address. To do so requires some important decisions on the part of TAFE as to areas to promote with their systems, but even more importantly, it requires some resourcing support for planning how such a system could be developed and implemented, while remaining useable and useful.

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